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SECOND BEST

A Delightful One-act Play

By Winifred M. David



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SECOND BEST

CHARACTERS

JOHN PRITCHARD—Crusty, but lovable, bachelor of forty-five.

JOAN DIXON—His niece and ward. An attractive and vivacious girl of twenty, who is adept at handling her uncle.

DICK MORLEY—A friend of Joan's.

MRS. MORLEY—Dick's mother and an old friend of John Pritchard's.

TED ALLAN—Joan's fiancee.

MAID.

TIME—the present.

PLACE—any small town.

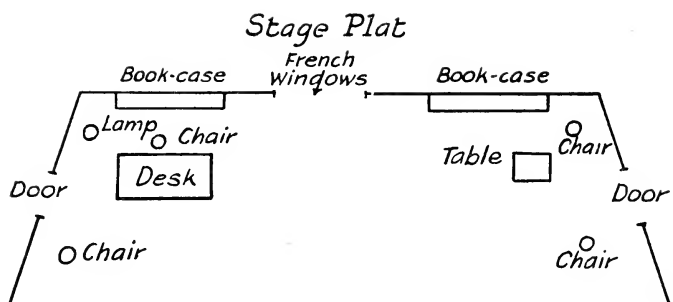
TIME OF PLAYING—about one hour.

SYNOPSIS

John Pritchard, author and confirmed bachelor of forty-five, is devoted to his young niece, Joan Dixon, whom he has given a home and is bringing up. Although he is much interested in Dick's mother, a charming young widow, he is greatly distressed because Dick appears to be very attentive to Joan.

Joan is most adept in handling her uncle. She has her way, as usual, when Ted Allan, her fiancee, and Dick's friend, appears.

Uncle John finds all his "fuming" about Dick was uncalled for—Dick had no intention of marrying Joan. After Joan wins his consent to marry Ted, he decides that he will marry the widow with whom he was "second best" some years ago, when she married Dick's father.



SECOND BEST

SCENE: *John Pritchard's den—a room that would be the bane of a tidy housewife. At the left is a large desk littered with papers in frightful confusion, with a telephone on one corner of it. Before the desk is a swivel chair. Book-cases stand on either side of French windows at the rear—the books in them being placed higgledy-piggledy, some lying across the others, and with gaps as if books had been taken out and not replaced. Two or three chairs, large and with much-worn leather seats, are arranged with no idea of an artistic setting, looking as if they had been pushed aside.*

As the curtain rises, a maid, with huge feather duster is just attempting to straighten the papers on the desk. John Pritchard enters from a door at the right.

JOHN: For goodness' sake, girl, leave this room alone—don't start dusting and upsetting things, here. I shan't know where a thing is. Last week—now, where's the blotter? Didn't I tell you—bother you women, anyway. There's the blotter looking at you—can't you speak, girl? Go and dust out the bird-cage—anything—but leave this room alone.

MAID: I'm sorry, sir, I thought—

JOHN: Don't think—just do as I say. [*Gathers up a few papers.*]

MAID: But, Mrs. Morley, sir—

JOHN: Well, what about Mrs. Morley?

MAID: She's coming here this afternoon.

JOHN: What the deuce for? She knows how busy I am—I must get this finished. Tell her I can't see her.

MAID: You asked her to come, sir.

JOHN: Oh, did I? Whatever did I do that for?
[Sits down.]

MAID: You didn't tell me, sir.

JOHN: Next time I do anything as foolish as that, just ask me at the time why I did it, so that you can tell me, understand?

MAID: Yes, sir. [Withdraws.]

JOHN: How can a man work with all these interruptions! Where is that last page? Drat that girl, why can't she leave things alone? Ah, here we are! [Reads.] "Jimmie, darling, do you mind—" [Looks puzzled.] Mind what? What in blazes was I going to put there? Why did I stop right there? "Jimmie, darling, do you mind—"

JOAN [bursting noisily into the room]: Uncle, darling, do you mind—

JOHN: Mind what, child? That's what I'm trying to remember.

JOAN: What, Uncle? I haven't said it before—at least not today.

JOHN: Stupid girl! I'm trying to remember what I was going to write next.

JOAN: Oh, I see. I was going to say, "Do you mind if I take the car this afternoon?"

JOHN: "Jimmie, darling, do you mind if I take the car this afternoon?"— But that won't do, because they're sitting in the moonlight. How helpful you are!

JOAN: But, darling, I'm not trying to help you write your old story. I'm trying to get you to listen to me. [Turns his swivel chair slightly around and seats herself on his desk facing him.]

JOHN: That's Chapter Ten you're sitting on, child—do be careful.

JOAN: Now, dearie, be a nice little uncle and forget all about your nasty story for two minutes.

JOHN: But, Joan—

JOAN: As I've been trying to say for an hour, "Do you mind if I take the car, as I've promised to meet Dick at the Golf Club at three o'clock?"

JOHN: What are you fooling about with that young blackguard for?

JOAN: Oh, Uncle, he's a dear in his way!

JOHN: His ways aren't mine, though, and I don't want them to be yours, either.

JOAN: Oh, bless it—it musn't get cross, now. Not over Dick, anyway—he doesn't deserve it. But may I take the car? Please.

JOHN: No, I don't think you may. I tell you, Joan, I don't like Dick.

JOAN: Why, you dear old silly?

JOHN: Now, don't "dear-old-silly" me. That means you always get your way. [*Pause.*] Oh, don't ask me why I don't like Dick—I don't know.

JOAN: But, duckie, that's absurd. You must have a reason.

JOHN [*shouts*]: I don't know. Oh, take the car and let me work.

JOAN: You old darling, [*kisses him*] I knew you would. [*Says this over her shoulder as she goes out.*]

JOHN [*to himself*]: So did I. Peace once more. What a house! Where was I? [*Reads.*] "Jimmie, darling, do you mind if I take the car—" [*Exasperatedly.*] Oh, no, no, no—"Jimmie, darling, do you mind—" If only I could remember!—"Jimmie, darling, do you mind if I break our engagement?"—That's it, at last.—"Because I love Dick."—Dick

be hanged. Besides she doesn't love Dick. But [*thoughtfully*] these young people nowadays, you never know. [*Starts walking up and down.*] Dear little Joan! But I suppose she thinks she's grown up now—nearly twenty. Bother Joan! [*Goes to table and tries to write.*]

MAID: Mrs. Morley, sir. [*Unaware that she has entered, John does not look up.*]

JOHN: Nuisance! Just when I've got down to business, again. Show— [*Rises confusedly as he realizes he has been overheard.*]

MRS. MORLEY: Now, John, don't apologize. [*Shakes hands.*] I know you meant every word of it. I love the truth at all costs—and I know you too well to let it bother me. After all, you did ask me to come, didn't you?

JOHN: So Susan told me. [*Motions her to a chair.*]

MRS. MORLEY: Your flattery is just as subtle as ever, John. [*Laughs.*]

JOHN: I'm hanged if I know what I asked you for, though. [*Rubs back of head, as if in thought.*]

MRS. MORLEY: John, John, you get worse and worse!

JOHN: Well, I'm not in the habit of inviting strange ladies— [*Sits near her.*]

MRS. MORLEY: Strange, John? Do you call me a strange lady?

JOHN: No, I suppose not. How many years is it—Lila? [*Hesitates before saying the name.*]

MRS. MORLEY: Must be all of twenty-eight years. Dick's going on twenty-four.

JOHN: Is he? Thinking of settling down yet?

MRS. MORLEY: I suppose he will now, he's finished Law School. He's going to hang out his shingle in the Fall.

JOHN: Here?

MRS. MORLEY: I hope so.

JOHN: So do I.

MRS. MORLEY: Why? Whatever difference does it make to you?

JOHN [*flushing guiltily*]: None—oh, none. It'll be nicer for you, though. I know how I'd feel if Joan went sky-rocketing off to the other end of the world.

MRS. MORLEY: You'll have to be prepared, John. You won't have her always. She's a very beautiful girl and is very attractive to men.

JOHN: Is she, by Jove? I haven't seen any young pups hanging round here, thank goodness!

MRS. MORLEY: My dear John, the house might be overrun with them, and you'd never know it. How could you be expected to, shut in this room from morning till night?

JOHN: Yes, but aren't they always noisy—always playing—what is it—jazz—always making general nuisances of themselves?

MRS. MORLEY: Of course not, John. They're all fond of fun and music and dancing, but they do have moments of sanity, you know.

JOHN: They must be very sane when they come here, then. But I must remember to ask Joan. That reminds me—she has gone out to meet Dick this afternoon.

MRS. MORLEY: Oh, that's news to me. I knew Dick had a game on at the Club, but he didn't say with whom. I might have suspected, though.

JOHN: What do you mean—suspected?

MRS. MORLEY: Well, John, since you are so delightfully blind and innocent, I might as well tell you that Dick is very fond of Joan, and, I think, when he has made a little headway in his profession, he hopes to marry her. Of course, I can't speak for Joan.

JOHN: No, you can't, nor anyone else. She has to ask me first, and I'll say no, no, no, for years yet. She's only a child and no man's going to run off with her before she has a chance to make up her mind.

MRS. MORLEY: Of course, not—but if her mind's made up?

JOHN: I'll soon change it for her. We've had a few little tussles before now, but she generally listens to reason.

MRS. MORLEY: Oh, what about the car that you simply weren't going to get?

JOHN: Well—er—that's different. After she mentioned it, I realized what a time-saver it would be in running in to the city—as I frequently have to do.

MRS. MORLEY: And what about the dog?

JOHN: Oh, I'd been thinking of getting one for a long time—all these burglaries, and hold-ups, and things—so that Joan merely voiced my thoughts.

MRS. MORLEY: Well, John, if Joan mentions the fact that she is engaged some day soon, you can say you'd been thinking of that, too—now that I've told you.

JOHN: I won't have it, I tell you—I'll stop it. I won't have Joan playing about with any men—I won't have her flying over to the Golf Club—I won't let her go to dances! [*Pounds the arm of his chair.*]

MRS. MORLEY: Won't you, John? You have a wonderful opinion of your powers of prevention. Evidently your knowledge of women has not increased since that night—how long ago, John?—when you—when I—

JOHN [*almost shouting*]: When you broke our engagement!

MRS. MORLEY: And you protested and shouted and bullied and said you'd make me change my mind.

JOHN: I had no right to say that, of course—but I *have* got the right with Joan. She's my ward—she's not even twenty-one—and she knows I only do things for her good.

MRS. MORLEY: All right, John—but if you come off second best again, don't say I didn't warn you.

JOHN: Good heavens, woman, haven't you been saying it to me all your life? Isn't that enough?

MRS. MORLEY: I didn't mean to be unkind, John—only to prepare you—to spare you.

JOHN [*speaking more softly*]: I know that, Lila, and as such I appreciate it—but don't worry about Joan and me—we understand each other—she'll listen to me. [*Sound of a motor.*] Here she comes, now, like a whirlwind. I wonder why she's back so soon. [*Goes to window.*] How often have I told her to slow down before she turns in the driveway—she tears in at about forty miles an hour, and then stops dead—hard on the brakes and the engine.

JOAN [*running into room followed by Dick*]: Here we are again, Uncle! Oh, good afternoon, Mrs. Morley. [*Takes off her hat, throws it at a chair, which it misses, and arranges her hair.*]

DICK [*shaking hands with John*]: How do you do, sir. [*Turns to his mother.*] Well, Mother, weren't long, were we?

MRS. MORLEY: What happened—you can't have played one hole?

JOAN [*sitting on edge of table*]: No, we didn't. The lords of creation [*Dick coughs sarcastically*] were playing in a match and it meant waiting for hours, so we decided to come home and play tennis instead.

MRS. MORLEY [*rising*]: I must be off, now. Are you coming, Dick?

DICK: Yes, Mother. I want to get my racquet.

MRS. MORLEY: Good-bye, John. [*To Joan.*] Your Uncle and I have had such a nice chat, Joan. [*Looks archly at John, who glowers.*]

JOAN: What about?

MRS. MORLEY: Oh, everything. Good-bye, dear. [*Kisses her. John goes to the door at the right with her, followed by Joan and Dick.*]

DICK: Toodle-oo, Joan. Be back in two shakes.

JOAN: All right.

[*Joan takes her Uncle's arm and says in a coaxing tone*]: Nunkey, dear—

JOHN: Nunkey! You know how I dislike that name. Makes me think of monkey.

JOAN: I think it just suits you—sort of cuddly. Now, just come and sit over here—I want to talk to you. [*Pulls him to a chair, and sits on the arm of it.*]

JOHN: This is ominous. What is it?

JOAN: Would you mind, very much, if I went away for the week-end? Alice Cummins is having a house-party at their summer home and she wants me to go.

JOHN: Any men going?

JOAN: Dick and—

JOHN: That settles it. I'm not going to have you tearing all over the countryside with these scatterbrain youths. The first thing I know, you'll be upset in a ditch and you'll be brought home dead. I've read too much about these fast young men. I don't say Dick's the worst, but he's probably tarred with the same brush. No, Joan, I forbid you to go.

JOAN: Darling—what's got into you? Why have you got such a grudge against Dick? He's the most harmless, steadiest boy you could meet.

JOHN: I don't care if he is—I forbid you to go.

JOAN: Nunkey, why are you so unfair? I hardly ever leave you, and now, just for a measly week-end— [*Gets off his chair*].

JOHN: That'll do, Joan, let's have no more discussion.

JOAN: I believe Mrs. Morley has been filling you up with some nonsense about Dick.

JOHN: Nothing of the kind.

JOAN [*searchingly*]: Now, Uncle, are you sure? [*Sits down.*]

JOHN: Not, nonsense, anyway. She opened my eyes, a little.

JOAN: Oh, how nice—have you been a tiny kitten all your life?

JOHN: Don't be sarcastic, Joan. You know what I mean.

JOAN: I'm afraid I don't.

JOHN [*gets up and wanders about*]: What a plague you are when you like. She simply told me about you and Dick.

JOAN: So I gather—but what did she tell you?

JOHN: Oh, you know—that you and he—oh, bother, surely I don't have to say it in so many words?

JOAN: No, dear, only a very few words, but *do* say it.

JOHN: Look here, Joan, I believe you're only doing this to be irritating.

JOAN: Honestly I'm not, Uncle. But you're so—so—unlucid. All I've made out so far is that Dick and I are supposed to be involved in some deep, dark scheme, of which I am entirely innocent.

JOHN: I didn't say anything about a scheme.

JOAN: Well, that's what I have inferred.

JOHN: Joan, I won't be cross-examined by a child like you. You know very well what I'm talking about, but if you want to be pig-headed, all right—I refuse to say another word. [*Sits himself at his desk again.*]

JOAN: Very well, Uncle, I suppose I can phone and ask Mrs. Morley what it's all about. [*Rises as if to go to the phone.*]

JOHN [*rising to prevent her*]: You'll do nothing of the sort.

JOAN: Really, Uncle, I shall begin to think I'm accessory to a murder or something, soon. Now, I can't even use the phone. [*Goes over to his desk and looks searchingly at him.*] What's it all about, anyway?

JOHN [*not looking up*]: If you must be told—you and Dick are getting much too friendly. You're only children, yet, and I'm not going to have you getting engaged to a penniless lawyer before you're out of your cradle.

JOAN: Well, dear, this baby has looked outside her cradle quite a bit and thinks penniless lawyers are rather nice. Is that all you have against Dick?

JOHN: He's bound to stay penniless—the Morleys never have had any gumption or initiative. What did Dick's father amount to?

JOAN: He captured Mrs. Morley anyway. [*Smiles to herself.*]

JOHN: After she'd been engaged to me! He was quite welcome to cast-offs.

JOAN: Oh, I thought you were the cast-off. I thought Mr. Morley just came and tucked her under his arm before your very eyes. He must have had some initiative.

JOHN: Just poaching. [*Contemptuously.*]

JOAN: Well, I suppose Mrs. Morley had some say. She wouldn't have let him poach if—

JOHN: Joan, will you stop aggravating me? What has Mrs. Morley's past got to do with Dick, anyway?

JOAN: Rather a lot, don't you think?

JOHN [*looking angrily at her*]: Anyhow, it's quite beside the point. I still say you must stop flying about with Dick. When you marry, I want it to be someone more worthy of you than a Morley.

JOAN: I think Dick's quite worthy of me, Uncle. And if he were anyone else's son, you'd think so, too. Just because Cupid dealt you the losing hand, you're venting it out on Dick.

JOHN: You woman—that's just what you would say. It's nothing of the kind.

JOAN: What is it, then?

JOHN: Joan [*exasperatedly*], why will you keep up these eternal questions? Surely, it should be sufficient that I forbid you to see so much of Dick? [*Dick's whistle is heard as he comes up the garden path.*]

JOAN: Here he is now!

DICK [*entering at French windows*]: Am I intruding?

JOAN: Not a bit, old pal. Uncle and I have been having such an interesting discussion.

DICK: Oh!

JOAN: And you've been the center of it.

JOHN: Good heavens, Joan—

JOAN: Well, hasn't he? [*No answer.*] Hasn't he?

JOHN [*shouting*]: Yes.

DICK: May I know why it concerned me?—I'm all curiosity.

JOAN [*rushing him into a chair and standing over him*]: I regret to say, Mr. Richard Morley, that it has been observed that you have been paying too much attention to one fair damsel in this town—namely Miss Joan Dixon. [*Looks slyly at her Uncle, who has lit his pipe and is puffing furiously.*] As the said Miss Dixon is still in her infancy and quite unable to discriminate for herself, it is requested by a committee of one that you spend less time with her, lest, perchance, [*John rises angrily and stalks out of the room*] her fluttering heart may become captive while she is still in her cradle. [*When John is out of earshot, Joan bursts out laughing and falls exhausted into a chair.*] My dear, I've had such a scream of a time with Uncle—he thinks we are getting too fond of each other. Evidently, your Mother has said something, because Uncle, who never notices anything, is quite excited and vows I mustn't see you. Wouldn't let me go to Alice Cummins' because you were going to be there. [*The two burst out laughing, again.*] Isn't that too lovely?

DICK: Well, old lady, I certainly make an effective smoke screen. Perhaps Ted might object if he knew.

JOAN: Darling old Ted—not he. He knows you're too staunch a friend to run off with his girl.

DICK: When are you going to tell your Uncle?

JOAN: I'm in no hurry. There's bound to be a doing, anyway, so I'm putting off the evil hour.

[*John and a stranger enter from the right.*]

JOHN: This way, young man. Dick, here's somebody looking for you.

JOAN [*aside*]: Ted!

DICK [*grasping Ted's hand*]: Ted, old man, what a surprise! Awfully glad to see you. You remember Joan, don't you?

TED: Why, rath—oh, yes, how do you do, Miss Dixon?

DICK: Mr. Pritchard, allow me to introduce an old friend of mine—Ted Allan.

JOHN [*gruffly*]: How do you do.

JOAN [*recovering from her first surprise*]: Won't you sit down, Mr. Allan? You and Dick don't want to burst into confidences right away, do you? [*All sit down, but Dick, who stands at the back.*]

TED [*meaningly to Joan*]: I should say not! I'd much rather talk to you.

DICK: Why didn't you say you were coming, old sport?

TED: Didn't know myself till this morning. Your Mother looked as if she'd seen a ghost when I walked into your house a little while ago. She wanted to phone you, but I said I knew the way [*looking at Joan*] here, so I'd come over and get you.

JOAN: Awfully glad you did, Mr. Allan. Too bad you didn't come a little sooner and you would

have found Uncle and me engaged in a most interesting discussion. Wouldn't he, Uncle?

JOHN: Am I never to hear the end of it?

TED: What was it all about?

JOAN: Me and marriage.

TED [*showing great interest*]: Oh!

JOHN: Now, Joan, if there's going to be another recital, I'm going to be the reciter.

JOAN: All right, Uncle, I don't mind. [*Winks at Dick, who walks over to French windows.*]

JOHN: Well, Mr. What's-your-name, my niece and I hold different opinions on the age that young women are capable of knowing their own minds about love. She thinks at twenty she is at liberty to throw herself at the first empty-headed youth that pays her attention. [*Ted looks uncomfortable. Dick turns round and grins.*]

JOAN: Uncle!

TED: I'm sure Miss Dixon is much too sensible to do anything like that.

JOHN: Huh! Is twenty ever sensible?

TED: In this case, I should think. But are you sure she has thrown herself at an empty-headed youth?

JOHN: She's going to do so, if I don't prevent it.

JOAN: Uncle, you're all wrong.

TED [*wonderingly*]: Oh, a chap in the town?

JOHN: Of course. [*Ted looks at Joan for an explanation.*]

JOAN: Uncle, dear, you're quite mistaken—

DICK [*coming to front*]: Well, sir, I'm sorry you think I'm empty-headed and that Joan is throwing herself away—

TED: You! You! Joan, is this right? Dick—

[*Joan shakes her head vehemently.*]

DICK: I know I have nothing of a position, now, but I hope to have some day—and if I have someone to work for—

TED [*rising indignantly*]: I insist on an explanation—I—sir?—

JOHN: At last, there is someone to side with me. Mr.—er—I congratulate you on your good sense. You can see the folly of two people as young as Joan and Dick getting engaged, can't you?

TED [*sadly*]: Do they love each other?

JOHN: They think they do, I don't doubt.

TED: Then nothing anyone says will make any difference. But it's not right—[*turning to Dick.*] Dick—you—

JOHN: Of course, it isn't right—that's what I've been trying to make them see. Perhaps they'll listen to you.

TED: But, I mean it isn't right because Joan—I—we—[*looks imploringly at Joan.*]

DICK: Anyway, Joan and I don't want to marry yet—not for a year or two—

TED: Marry! You talk of marrying, you scoundrel, while I—

JOHN: That's it, Mr. What's-your-name, give it to him—

JOAN: Oh, let's stop all this nonsense—

TED: I'm glad you think it's nonsense—I call it serious.

JOAN: Uncle, will you believe me when I tell you that Dick and I are not engaged—and not even in love—

TED: That's right, deny it now!

JOHN: Dick, do you ask me to believe that?

DICK: You make it difficult for me, sir—

TED: He can't deny it—and I thought he was my best friend!

JOHN: There you are, he doesn't deny it.

TED: Dick—I'll— [*Walks menacingly towards Dick.*]

JOAN: Ted—Mr. Allan—please don't, I can explain.

JOHN: Explain? What do you mean—explain?

JOAN: Oh, nothing, Uncle—it's just that I don't want Mr. Allan to misunderstand Dick.

JOHN: Humph! Mr. Allan understands him only too well, the same as I do.

TED: Unfortunately, yes.

JOAN: Well, Uncle, if you're determined not to believe me, will it satisfy you if Dick and I agree not to see each other more than once a week?

JOHN: Now, you're more sensible. Do you agree, Dick?

DICK: Yes, sir.

JOHN: And you can tell your mother when you go home that I'm not second best this time—she'll know what I mean.

TED: I appear to be the second best in this case.

JOAN: Ted, please—

JOHN: You?

TED: Yes. Even if Joan and Dick only meet once a week, how does that benefit me, if they still love each other?

JOAN: Ted—we don't.

JOHN: But I don't understand—where do you come in?

TED: That's the point, I don't, apparently—I'm only the chief mourner.

JOHN: I wish you'd make yourself clear, young man.

TED: Well, sir, is it nothing to be engaged to a girl and then find you're not—that somebody else has stolen a march—

JOHN: Good heavens! Are you in love, too! It must be an epidemic. Poor boy, I'm very sorry—I know what it means. Was she young, too?

TED: Twenty.

JOHN: I knew it—didn't I tell you—they don't know their minds. Is she someone in town?

TED: Yes—

JOAN: I'm the culprit.

JOHN: Joan!

JOAN: Yes, Uncle, it's true. Ted and I have been engaged since Christmas and still are, as far as I'm concerned. [*She takes Ted's hand.*]

TED: Joan, do you mean that? Then it isn't true—about Dick—

JOHN: Well— [*rumples his hair agitatedly*] well, I won't have it, d'ye understand. I forbid it—I won't have it. You're only a child.

JOAN: Silly old Nunkey—I shall be twenty-one next birthday and, child or not, I'm going to marry Ted next Christmas if I have to run away to do it. [*Turns to Dick.*] Dick, take Ted out in the garden to cool off after all this mix-up, while I explain to Uncle. [*Dick and Ted Exeunt.*] [*To Uncle.*] Now, be a nice Uncle, and come and sit down and I'll tell you all about it.

JOHN [*raging up and down with Joan, trying to keep pace with her*]: Such deception—my own niece! So Mr.—er—the scoundrel! You shan't marry him—hear me?—He's worse than Dick. So Dick was the blind, was he?

JOAN [*dragging him by the arm*]: Uncle, dear, do come and sit down—I can't explain anything, fuming about like this.

JOHN: I don't want to sit down— [*She pulls him into the biggest arm-chair*].—I won't listen to a word. [*She sits on his knee, and leans her head on his shoulder and plays with the lapel of his coat.*] Nothing you say can make me change my mind. I'm not going to listen.

JOAN: You see, Uncle, Ted, my fiancé—

JOHN: Fiancé! [*Contemptuously.*]

JOAN: Ted was staying with Dick all last Christmas holidays and I sort of saw quite a lot of him, one way and another—

JOHN: *Did you?*

JOAN: And I began to feel all sort of squiggly inside—did you ever feel squiggly inside?

JOHN: Squiggly! What a question! Of course not.

JOAN: Not even when you were engaged to Mrs. Morley?

JOHN: Er—don't be impertinent!

JOAN: Anyhow, I soon realized this squiggliness meant I was—oh, terribly fond of Ted—much fonder than I had ever been of Dick, or Jack Hedges, or Edwin Dodge—and I have been pretty fond of each of them in my day—

JOHN: Your day! Good heavens!

JOAN: And, funny enough, Ted felt the same way about me, and so—well—there wasn't anything else to do was there, but become engaged, secretly, of course? Only Dick knew about it, and he was too good a sport to tell.

JOHN [*indignantly*]: I suppose I'm too poor a sport—

JOAN: No, darling, it was simply because I didn't want to upset you—I knew you'd go off the deep end whenever I told you, so what was the use of doing it months before it was necessary?

JOHN: What do you mean—go off the deep end? Speak English.

JOAN: You know—feel cut-up—make a fuss—which, of course, dear, [*pats his face*] is only natural—I quite understand.

JOHN: Have I gone off the deep end? Have I made a fuss?

JOAN: Darling, you've been wonderful, and I'd have told you a long time ago if I'd known you'd have been so reasonable.

JOHN: Am I not generally reasonable?

JOAN: Yes, dear, but this is one time in a girl's life when uncles and fathers are sometimes inclined to be unreasonable. And I wasn't to know, was I?

JOHN: Of course not.

JOAN: But you've been splendid. [*Thoughtfully.*] I shall hate leaving you alone, though. You'll have to come and live with us.

JOHN: Uh! No, thank you—an old crab among turtle-doves—never!

JOAN [*wickedly*]: You'd better marry Mrs. Morley then—I'm sure she'd be delighted.

JOHN: Wh-at? Don't be absurd, child. She's quite happy with Dick—

JOAN: She won't always have him, though.

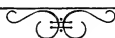
JOHN [*thoughtfully*]: I must tell her that. That's what she said to me about you.

JOAN [*getting off his knee*]: Now, I must go and comfort poor old Ted. I shall tell him how wonderful you've been about everything. [*Runs off stage, singing.*]

JOHN [*rises and drops into his chair at desk, resting his head on his hands, and muttering*]: Wonderful! My little Joan—little Joan! [*Blows nose violently and tries to write again. Reads.*] “Jimmie, darling, do you mind if I break our engagement?” “Lila,” he gasped, “Lila, what do you mean—I—you”—but, dash it all, the woman's name isn't Lila. It's—what is it? Lila's a pretty name, too. Lila! Lila! [*Says the name over softly. Gazes into space. Then reaches for the telephone.*] 2131—no, I said 1231, not 2131. What? I want 3121—no, 1231—oh, I don't know! [*Bangs down receiver and looks savagely through the telephone book.*] What is the matter with all these women—can't even give me a simple number. There—3121, just what I said in the first place. [*Takes down receiver, again.*] Now, central, will you give me 3121, please? [*Pause.*] Mrs. Morley, please. [*Pause.*] Lila? I remember now, what I wanted you for this afternoon. May I come over and tell you this evening? What's the matter, did you say? I have a squiggly feeling. [*Pause.*] Of course you don't. Never mind, I'll explain, tonight.

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Ducks. By Harriett Connell. Three-act Western comedy-drama for 6 m., 4 w. Of the many plays read and reviewed, we liked "Ducks" about the best. Marilou Drury, after her father's death, manages the ranch, assisted by Terry, the foreman, Samantha, the housekeeper, Doc Marshall, veterinarian, Heine, the chore-boy, and cowboys. Dallas Gibson from the east makes her an offer for the farm and as she is losing money is inclined to accept it but Terry dissuades her, and they decide to raise ducks. Peggy, a college chum, drops in and livens things up. A wrecked airplane, with the pilot brought to the ranch for recovery, adds the element of mystery. Real dramatic situations ensue when Gibson kidnaps Marilou in an attempt to force her to sign the deed. Samantha captures Gibson, Terry is wounded in rescuing Marilou, Jarvis recovers and remembers that he is commissioned to offer a handsome sum for the ranch as it is valuable oil land. He falls for Peggy; Terry and Marilou are not in-

different to each other and even Samantha finally melts a little toward Doc. Heine is left to tend the "Ducks." Parts well balanced and this play will prove a winner. Plays whole evening. Easy setting. **Royalty \$10, each succeeding performance \$5.** Director's guide furnished free with every cast purchased. Price 35c.

Sonny-Jane. A comedy mirth-quake in 3 acts by Eugene Hafer, author of Cyclone Sally, Welcome Home, Jimmy, and others. 5 m., 7 f. One interior. Plays full evening. We unhesitatingly recommend this as one of the most laughable comedies of the year. Rapid action, uproarious comedy, and a plot that mounts to a tremendous climax are its main ingredients. The characters are delightfully humorous. There are Charlie Mitchell, energetic Larry, and peppery Sam Streck who arrive in Orchard Center with the unchivalrous purpose of squelching Sonny-Jane; charming and independent Sonny-Jane, who objects to being squelched; Pansy, slowest hired girl in the world; Joe Martin, who doesn't intend to be a yokel all his life; coy Lucille; blunt Peggy; troublesome Ruby; snappy Nancy Wade; Freddie Beadle, the "shriek" of Orchard Center; and Mrs. Spitsendorf who has had "such poor luck mit husbands" but is willing to take another chance on unwilling Sam. **Royalty for first performance \$10; \$5 for each performance thereafter.** Director's guide free with each cast purchased. Price 35c.



Brass Tacks. An unusual 3-act play, by Edith R. McComas. 4 m., 6 w., also minor characters. Plays about 1 1/2 hrs. One easy interior of a modern home. Cisserilla, the beautiful daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Simpkins, is very poetical and artistic in her tastes, and does not return the love of Jack Bradford, a practical young miller of the town. She does, however, consider very favorably Dr. Slovinsky, the villain of the play, on account of his pleasing manners and his artistic tastes. Slovinsky takes advantage of this friendship and the fact that he is Mrs. Simpkin's physician, and secretes Mr. Simpkin's will and other valuable papers, including receipts for a mortgage on the home, which he holds. At Mr. Simpkin's sudden death, he deceives the family and uses his knowledge to his own advantage. Interesting complications develop and are unravelled by Cisserilla discovering the will and papers, shaking off poetry and Slovinsky, getting down to "Brass Tacks," proving herself competent to take care of her father's business and finally marrying the hero, Jack Bradford. Comedy is introduced by Bridget, the Irish maid. Good class play or for any dramatic club. **Royalty \$10 for each performance, \$5 each additional.** Director's guide for this play given with each cast purchased. Price 35c.

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